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ABSTRACT

For its sixth national conference, a national collaboration in support of school reform sharpened its focus by asking Houston Independent School District (HISD) to host the conference and serve as a "case study." HISD was an ideal subject because of a long history of addressing statewide standards-based reform and engaging in multiple reform efforts. The conference theme became high school reform, focusing on the role of smaller learning communities (SLCs) in enhancing equity and accountability in high schools. This proceedings summarizes six major sessions: overview of high school reform in Houston; open discussion on Houston's efforts; panel discussion of evidence from research and practice on achieving equity in high schools through SLCs; structured interview about strategies to engage parents and communities in high school reform; presentation on federal and state expectations for school accountability; and panel discussion on the meaning and consequences of the accountability movement. Committed to a systematic improvement process since 1990, HISD has recently focused on high school reform, with several efforts aimed at transforming large high schools into SLCs with no more than 300 students. The goal is to reduce anonymity and personalize students' learning experience. Generally, principals and teachers find that transformation is difficult but rewarding work. Educators cited challenges in scheduling and finding time for professional development. Two strong cautions about SLCs were that they do not always change classroom practices, and they may result in new forms of tracking. Nevertheless, SLCs were seen as a way to reconcile the standards-based accountability movement with educator concerns about serving every child and retaining some flexibility in judging performance. (SV)

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ANNENBERG INSTITUTE for SCHOOL REFORM

Enhancing Equity and Accountability through Smaller Learning Communities in High Schools

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

CPRE

Consortium for Policy Research in Education

ED 466 670

Conference Proceedings

March 22–23, 2002
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Introduction

In 1996, leaders at the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE), and the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory's School Improvement Program (NWREL) met to discuss ways to improve national collaboration in support of school change. The result was an agreement to sponsor a series of five annual conferences focusing on the scaling up of school reform efforts. In 1999, two new partners signed on as co-sponsors: the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI). Each of the five conferences brought researchers, model developers, and practitioners together to share what they had learned.

After the fifth conference in December 2000, the partners agreed to continue the series for another five years. Instead of simply bringing participants together to discuss school reform, however, the partners decided to sharpen the focus by asking a school district to host the conference and serve as a "case study." Under this arrangement, researchers and practitioners from around the country would learn firsthand about the challenges of school reform in action. The partner district in turn would benefit from the assembled wisdom of the visitors, using their insights to improve its own efforts.

Two other organizations agreed to support the 2002 conference: the National Clearinghouse for Comprehensive School Reform (NCCSR), and the Southwest Education Development Laboratory (SEDL). And the Houston Independent School District (HISD) agreed to serve as the host. Houston was an ideal district for at least three reasons:

1. As a large urban district, HISD faces challenges similar to those faced by many such districts around the country.
2. For years, Texas has been a leader in efforts to raise standards, develop statewide assessments, and establish accountability systems for students and schools (an approach now enshrined as a national strategy after passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001). HISD, therefore, has considerable experience in addressing the challenges of standards-based reform.
3. HISD has engaged in multiple initiatives over the past few years: comprehensive school reform, the Annenberg Challenge, smaller learning communities, and others. The district's experience in implementing and coordinating these efforts would likely prove instructive for those engaged in similar work.

After a series of discussions, HISD and the partner organizations agreed that the general theme of the conference would be high school reform. Particular attention would be paid to the role of smaller learning communities in enhancing equity and accountability in high schools.

On March 22 and 23, HISD and the partner organizations welcomed over 100 participants to the Westin Galleria Hotel in Houston. Participants included teachers, principals, and district officials from Houston and around the country, plus researchers, model developers, state education agency reform managers, and staff from regional laboratories and the U.S. Department of Education. Many participants attended as members of regional teams, which were organized by the laboratories.

Overview of the Conference Agenda

There were six major sessions during the conference:

1. The Houston Design: Setting the Stage: an overview of high school reform in Houston

2. The Houston Case: An Open Discussion: a "fishbowl" discussion for panelists and others to provide various perspectives on Houston's efforts

3. Smaller Learning Communities and Equity: a panel discussion of evidence from research and practice on achieving equity in high schools through the development of smaller learning communities

4. Engaging Stakeholders in High School Transformation: a structured interview addressing strategies for engaging parents and community members in high school reform

5. Federal and State Perspectives on Accountability for High School Reform: a presentation on federal and state expectations for school accountability

6. Implications of Accountability for High School Reform: a panel discussion on the meaning and consequences of the accountability movement

After each session, conference participants were invited to ask questions, make comments, or otherwise engage in the discussion as they saw fit. Following the question-and-comment period, participants broke into small groups to continue the discussion. In general, small groups (a) made suggestions for HISD as the district expands its reform efforts, and (b) discussed the implications of what they had heard for work in their own schools and districts.

Summary of Key Points

THE AGE OF ACCOUNTABILITY

The Texas accountability system, instituted in 1994, involves assessment in grades three through eight plus a high school exit exam. Scores are disaggregated by race/ethnicity and socio-economic status, and schools are graded on the results. The federal No Child Left Behind act essentially expands this approach to the nation as a whole. The legislation decrees that state standards will drive school reform. State assessments are to be aligned with standards. An accountability system will monitor the extent to which schools are helping students meet standards. The general idea is to raise the academic expectations for all students and hold schools responsible for helping students meet those expectations.

SCHOOL REFORM IN HOUSTON

Houston's school reform effort pre-dated the Texas accountability system. In 1990, the Houston Independent School District (HISD) committed to a systematic improvement process. HISD stakeholders agreed upon a shared purpose and a set of core values. The overall focus was on increased student performance across a common academic core, with enough flexibility for schools to develop their own approaches. From 1994 to 2001, there were meaningful improvements in test scores in all grades tested. Some problems remained, however, including a ninth-grade logjam and a high dropout rate. In response, HISD has been focusing for the past several years on high school reform, supported by a Carnegie Foundation grant, an Annenberg Challenge grant, and several other efforts. Extensive planning and public engagement strategies with all stakeholders have accompanied these efforts.

SMALLER LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Several of these efforts involve the transformation of large high schools into smaller learning communities (SLCs). Key SLC elements include:

- Independent communities (schools-within-schools) with no more than 300 students
- Student/teacher ratio of 70 to 1
- Shared planning and leadership among teachers
- A special focus for each community
- Multi-year relationships between students and teachers

The idea is to reduce anonymity and personalize the learning experience for students. Teachers and students have more opportunities to get to know one another, in smaller classes and across multiple years. Better teacher/student relationships can foster greater family involvement. With fewer students, teachers also can use more engaging instructional strategies.

LESSONS/CHALLENGES

Several comprehensive high schools in Houston are in the first or second year of transformation into SLCs. The general experience of principals and teachers thus far is that the transformation is challenging but rewarding work. Years of preparation, capacity building, and public engagement have helped teachers, parents, and the general public to support the change (albeit with pockets

of resistance). Teachers are working together to solve problems, examine student work, and develop more engaging instructional strategies. Two of the main challenges, they said, are scheduling and finding time for professional development.

Two strong cautions also emerged from the discussion of SLCs:

- ***Transformation into smaller learning communities does not necessarily lead to changes in classroom practice.*** SLCs are not ends in themselves, but vehicles for changing beliefs and actions. It is not enough to create SLCs and hope teachers will develop new instructional strategies. Leaders need to provide clear expectations and the means for teachers to parlay these structures into more engaging and challenging experiences for students.
- ***Transformation into smaller learning communities can result in a new version of tracking.*** Leaders must ensure that low-achieving students are not allowed to pool in selected academies. Each SLC must be designed to attract students of all backgrounds. Staff must gather data on the composition and performance of each academy. Each academy must be held to the same high standards. Vigilance is crucial.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

Although the accountability movement is firmly entrenched in Texas and is becoming established across the U.S., there are still many educators who view the movement with concern. They fear that in the rush to boost standardized test scores, policymakers are limiting students' opportunities for genuine learning and growth. Their idea of accountability involves something more personal: a commitment to do whatever it takes to reach each child, and a willingness to apply more flexible standards in judging performance. These voices also were heard at the conference.

Smaller learning communities can be seen as a way to reconcile these two approaches. The hope of most conference participants is that SLCs will enable teachers to know students better and use that knowledge to help them learn better. What students learn obviously will have to include knowledge and skills delineated by state standards. But there's a good chance that, in an SLC, that knowledge can be made more relevant to students' own interests and needs. Students also can develop close relationships with caring adults, experience new modes of instruction, and learn what it means to belong. In short, smaller learning communities can be a means for meeting standards and so much more.

The Houston Design: Setting the Stage

SPEAKER: ***Robert Stockwell,*** Chief Academic Officer, Houston Independent School District

PURPOSE: To provide an overview of high school reform efforts in Houston since 1990

The Houston Independent School District is a large urban district with many of the same challenges faced by other large urban districts around the country: high poverty, large numbers of non-native speakers, and scarce resources, among others. In 2001-02, there were 208,462 students in the district. Seventy-seven percent qualified for free/reduced lunch. Fifty-five percent are Hispanic, 32 percent African American, 10 percent white, 3 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, and less than 1 percent American Indian/Alaskan.

Twelve years ago, Stockwell said, HISD was in disarray. The district had an uncoordinated instructional program and a high dropout rate. Schools were over-regulated and under-achieving. Parents weren't involved, and the public had a negative image of the system. Instead of mobilizing for improvement, educators and administrators were busy making excuses.

In 1990, things began to change. HISD educators agreed upon a shared purpose, a set of core values, and a declaration of beliefs and visions. The overall focus was on increased student performance across a common academic core. Instead of "random acts of improvement," HISD committed to a systematic improvement process, aligning reforms with goals, yet allowing schools considerable flexibility to achieve those goals. Accountability systems were developed.

From 1994 to 2001, there were meaningful improvements in test scores in all grades tested (3-8, 10). For example, in 1994, less than 50 percent of 5th-graders passed TAAS (Texas Assessment of Academic Skills). In 2001, almost 90 percent passed. Community support for the schools also increased considerably.

Yet problems remain. First, student performance dips noticeably at the secondary level. Second, there is a logjam of students in 9th grade, due partially to high retention rates at that level. Third, the dropout rate is excessive. In 2000-01, there were more than 20,000 9th graders in the system and less than 7,500 12th graders. Fourth, 50 percent of HISD students who do graduate need remedial work in college. Fifth, teacher expectations for students are low. A survey revealed that 71 percent of high school students believed they would go to college, whereas teachers believed that percentage would only be 32 percent. Finally, requirements for high school graduation are about to increase in Texas. The dropout rate may rise as a result, as more and more high school students abandon hope of meeting standards. So there is certainly cause for continued reform at the secondary level in Houston.

Over the past several years, high school reform has proceeded under a number of banners: a Carnegie Foundation grant, the Houston Annenberg Challenge, a Smaller Learning Communities grant, Communities in Schools, Project GRAD, and several school reform models (e.g., Coalition of Essential Schools, Co-nect, First Things First, High Schools That Work). Several of these efforts involve the transformation of large high schools into smaller learning communities.

To help coordinate these efforts, HISD created the *Vision and Guiding Principles for the 21st Century High School Learning Community.* This document, which contains principles and goals for high school reform, has been adopted by the school board as official policy. HISD also has divided its 24 comprehensive high schools into three tiers, based on the seriousness of their needs. The 10 schools in the lowest tier are receiving attention first.

Principals and school staff ultimately determine the direction reform will take at each school. "The district's job," said Stockwell, "is to keep the pressure on in terms of accountability and results, and to provide resources to support their effort."

The Houston Case: An Open Discussion

MODERATOR: ***Warren Simmons,*** Executive Director, Annenberg Institute for School Reform

PANELISTS: ***Armando Alaniz,*** Principal, Reagan High School (Houston)
Leslie Austin, Teacher, Lee High School (Houston)
Linda Clarke, Executive Director, Houston Annenberg Challenge
Stephanie Lee, Project Director, Schools for a New Society
Laurie Levin, Director, Institute for Research and Reform in Education
Bea Marquez, Mayor's Anti-Gang Task Force, Houston
Margaret Stroud, Deputy Superintendent of School Administration, HISD

PURPOSE: To give various stakeholders an opportunity to share their perspectives on high school reform efforts in Houston

This panel followed a "fishbowl" format. The moderator and panelists sat in a circle in the center of the room, surrounded by conference participants. After panelists introduced themselves and spoke briefly about their roles, the moderator asked a series of key questions. Most of the questions involved the challenges and consequences of transforming comprehensive high schools into smaller learning communities (SLCs). An open chair was left at the table during the conversation, so that at any time, conference participants who so desired could join the conversation.

PERSONALIZATION

Simmons first asked about the evidence panelists had used to make the case for SLCs, both within the schools themselves and to community members outside the schools.

Panelists said they used the following to build their case:

Evidence	*Implications*
Dropout rate	Something must be done to connect with the thousands of students who disappear between 9th and 12th grade
Student surveys and focus groups: half of students say there is no adult at their school who knows or cares about them	High schools need to be reorganized to make it possible for adults and students to know each other
Houston's magnet schools, often smaller schools or schools-within-schools, have worked well for the top 20 percent of Houston students	If small schools are good for the best students, they would be good for all students

In general, panelists said, personalization should replace anonymity in high schools. Teachers and students need opportunities to get to know one another, in smaller classes and across multiple years. Better teacher/student relationships can foster greater involvement with families. With fewer students, teachers also can use more varied and engaging instructional strategies. Overall, personalization can lay the foundation for more challenging academic work.

Many of today's decision makers, Simmons responded, were around during the days of consolidation. At that time, the case was being made that larger schools would increase specialization and efficiency. Against this backdrop, he asked, would the argument for personalization fall on deaf ears?

Times change, panelists responded. Businesses aren't doing the same things now that they were 30 years ago. Why should schools? Education needs to be defined by the needs of children today, not by priorities from the past. For example, students need to be engaged in different ways now than they did before the advent of video games and the Internet. SLCs help make new engagement strategies possible.

What about standards, Simmons asked. Is there contradiction between (a) demanding that all students reach a common set of standards, and (b) devoting more attention to the individual needs of each student?

There is no inconsistency between personalization and higher standards, panelists responded. Getting to know students better, learning their interests and talents, makes it possible for teachers to raise expectations and tailor instruction accordingly.

WHAT ARE SMALLER LEARNING COMMUNITIES?

Simmons then asked what the key elements of an SLC were. Although the details differ from school to school, the typical scenario for transforming a large high school into multiple SLCs involves the following:

- Creating independent communities for groups of students and teachers with no more than 300 students
- Assigning an assistant principal, special education teacher, and counselor to each SLC (or, if that is not possible, to two SLCs)
- Reducing the student/teacher ratio to about 70 to 1
- Enabling shared planning and leadership among teachers
- Developing a special focus for each community to grab students' attention
- Keeping students and teachers together for at least two years
- Relinquishing the master schedule
- Providing consistency and continuity of care

BEWARE OF TRACKING

Several panelists warned that, in transforming large high schools into SLCs, care must be taken not to inadvertently re-establish tracking at the school by allowing low-achieving students to pool in some academies. Vigilance is crucial, said one panelist. Staff must actively work to

maintain equity. Each SLC must be designed to attract students of all backgrounds. Staff must gather data on the composition and performance of each academy. And each academy must be held to the same high standards.

High achieving students pose another challenge. Schools must make sure that someone is available to teach advanced curriculum when students are ready for it.

As for non-native speakers, one option for schools is to create "newcomer" communities, where students would stay for a ***maximum*** of one year before choosing another academy. A similar option might be available for ninth graders who enter high school more than two years behind. Schools could have a special opportunity center for accelerating their progress. Again, this would be available for a maximum of one year.

ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY

As conference participants began coming forward to occupy the empty chair, the conversation turned to the connection between personalizing the educational experience for students and involving families and communities in that experience. One participant commented that it would be ideal if teachers could live in the communities where they teach. Whether you live there or not, a panelist replied, it is important to get to know the community around the school. One way to do that is start with children's families. Invite parents to the school, then invite neighbors. Open the school doors to other organizations. If you look at the school as a potential hub of community activity, you can personalize education for everyone involved.

TEACHER INTERACTION, PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, AND TIME

One participant asked the teacher on the panel what her experience in a small learning community had been like. The teacher's high school was in the second year of transformation into SLCs. The 2,100-student school had been divided into nine themed communities and one newcomer community. The first year was difficult, reported the teacher. There were many unknowns and some resistance among some colleagues. This year has been much more positive, she said. Teachers are interacting in ways they never have before, working together to solve discipline problems and develop engaging instruction.

Other panelists concurred that teacher collaboration and learning are crucial if SLCs are going to be equitable and effective. The high school principal said that his school, a pilot for the Annenberg Challenge project, has spent lots of money on staff development and leadership training. As a result, he said, many teachers now feel more empowered to form action teams, come up with new ideas, and work together to see them through. Another panelist said that schools she works with are asking teachers to examine student work relative to standards, so that all teachers hold the same high expectations for all student work. Others commented that schools need to be smart in assigning teachers together who can work with, challenge, and learn from each other.

Discussions of professional development inevitably lead to expressions of concern about lack of time, and this discussion was no exception. "Time is the biggest enemy," said the principal.

"You have to be creative with it." His staff did some Saturday and summer development work, for pay, which took extra resources (provided by the Annenberg grant). Another panelist mentioned that reallocation of funds is an important strategy (although a politically difficult one) for supporting time for professional development.

Time is important in two other ways, commented one panelist. First, before an intensive reform initiative such as smaller learning communities is implemented, district and school leadership must allow time for the school community to familiarize themselves with the initiative and determine whether and how to proceed. One school reform model, for example, holds a two-day retreat for the entire school community before implementation. Then it spends most of the first year working out the details of reform. Second, school, district, and state leadership must have patience with the reform effort. It may take three to five years after implementation before the changes take hold and student performance begins increasing.

CHALLENGES

Simmons asked panelists what they believed the major challenges to reform were, other than time. Among the challenges mentioned:

- ***Rules and Regulations:*** Teachers have lots of good ideas, but it is often difficult to put them into practice because of regulatory barriers.
- ***Implementation:*** Developing a vision for SLCs is one thing, but figuring out what steps to take to realize that vision is quite another (example: working out teacher and student schedules across multiple SLCs).
- ***Resources:*** HISD has given schools the authority to decide on their own reforms, but providing enough resources to support those reforms is difficult.
- ***Parent Involvement:*** Getting parents to participate and support reforms is a major challenge.
- ***Achievement Gap:*** The achievement gap between ELL and native speakers is hard to close.
- ***High School Reform:*** Building support for high school reform is tough, because so much attention has been paid to elementary school reform.

The discussion ended on a cautionary note. A conference participant reported that he had studied SLCs in two other large urban school districts. He said that the schoolwide structures themselves were popular. The structures did not lead, however, to corresponding changes in classroom practice. The key in this type of effort, he said, was to parlay structural change into genuine change in teaching and learning.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS

After the fishbowl discussion, conference participants broke into small discussion groups. Each group was asked to report two points to the large group: (1) an indication that the HISD reform effort is on the right track, and (2) a suggestion to keep the effort moving forward. Among the responses:

On-Track

- All stakeholders in Houston are working together, moving in the same direction.
- HISD took time up front to develop a clear vision, do research, marshal resources, and foster public support for reform.
- HISD is gathering data and presenting an honest picture of progress to the public.
- The school is the locus of change. HISD is attempting to re-allocate resources and drive funding to the school site.
- The right structures, such as time for teacher collaboration within SLCs, are in place.
- Schools are working patiently and systematically, building capacity rather than looking for quick fixes.

Advice

- Remember that structural change is the mechanism, not the goal. Provide clear expectations for successful classroom practice, that is, for ways teachers can improve instruction to capitalize on new structures. Use critical friends groups, lesson videotaping, or other means to help teachers learn and change.
- Continue to focus on the needs of students.
- Use data to steer the process, not just report on results. Develop a data system that is capable of providing data at the student and SLC level, rather than just the school and district level.
- Do not neglect career-academic integration.
- Increase parent and community engagement in reform, using students as ambassadors.
- Keep equity issues front and center.
- Watch out for teacher burnout.
- Shift — eventually — from the school as the locus of change to the broader community as the locus of change, and from traditional learning models to models that reflect the needs of the 21st century.

Smaller Learning Communities and Equity

MODERATOR: ***Jonathon Supovitz,*** Senior Researcher, Consortium for Policy Research in Education

PANELISTS: ***Dick Corbett,*** Education Consultant
Jim Kemple, Senior Fellow, Manpower Development Research Corporation
Ivy Levingston, Principal, Westbury High School (Houston)

PURPOSE: To examine research and practice on achieving equity in high schools through the development of smaller learning communities

During this discussion, panelists took a few minutes to discuss their research on or experience with smaller learning communities. After the panelists spoke, the moderator asked several questions, then opened the floor for questions and comments from all conference participants.

RESEARCH ON CAREER ACADEMIES

Kemple began by discussing his research on Career Academies, a type of SLC characterized by an integration of academic with work-related courses of study. Students were randomly assigned either to a career academy or a regular high school program, then followed from ninth grade through their transition to postsecondary education or work. Researchers examined the impact of career academies on student performance and engagement, among other things. Kemple presented the results in terms of opportunities, risks, and limitations.

Opportunities

As expected, academy students were more likely to experience enhanced teacher and peer supports — such as higher expectations, more individualized attention, and more opportunity to work collaboratively with peers — than students in the control group. Researchers also found higher levels of engagement for academy students, as measured by attendance and other variables.

Risks

If not done well, career academies have the potential to have negative effects on students. In cases where academy students were not provided with an appropriate level of support, there was a reduced focus on academic work (in favor of vocational courses). In equity terms, this can be seen as a form of tracking, Kemple said. Additionally, in some academies, students experienced a kind of isolation, a sense that they were restricted to their own corner of the world and denied the opportunity to engage in broader experiences with their peers.

Limitations

The researchers found little or no impact on student academic achievement, graduation rates, or initial transitions to postsecondary education or employment for academy students (although

there were some positive effects on graduation rate and course completion for students classified as the high-risk subgroup). The lesson Kemple drew from this overall lack of impact was that small learning communities may be necessary for improving student engagement and some types of instructional reform, but they are by no means sufficient. "You need to do more than simply restructure a high school around a more personalized learning environment, introduce a career theme, and ask students and teachers to engage in some cross-disciplinary integration," he said.

Strong Small Learning Communities

Kemple identified the following characteristics of the strongest small learning communities:

- Well-defined boundaries (identifiable location, block scheduling, teachers with full-time equivalents inside the learning community, year-to-year looping)
- Opportunities for teachers to collaborate (shared planning time, a place to meet, some guidance about what is to be accomplished during planning time)
- Support for academic advising (someone needs to keep an eye on course-taking patterns and other areas of student performance)
- Heterogeneous student population

FIRST-YEAR DEVELOPMENT OF SMALLER LEARNING COMMUNITIES

"We have burned rubber in the change curve at Westbury High School," Levingston said.

In other words, the transition from a comprehensive high school to smaller learning communities has been a challenge, with some obstacles along the way. But it is a positive challenge, she said, because SLCs can be a vehicle for realizing all the good ideas that teachers, parents, and students have long envisioned.

The vision of equity at Westbury involves the following:

- ***For Students:*** Students will come to school every day, have high self esteem, disregard the ways they have been labeled in the past, and focus on realizing their potential. Their educational experiences will challenge them and help them achieve their goals.
- ***For Teachers:*** Teachers will accept the challenge of teaching all students, regardless of category or background, and they will recognize the value of heterogeneous grouping.
- ***For Administrators/Counselors:*** Administrators and counselors must be committed to helping all students maximize their potential, regardless of how they have been typecast in the past.
- ***For Parents:*** All parents will become active participants in their children's education; parents of higher achieving students will be open-minded about having their children learn with "those kids."
- ***For the Business Community:*** The business community will recognize that current students are their future employees and provide support for high quality education.

All stakeholders, Levingston said, need to offer empathy, not sympathy. They need to provide support, but not a crutch for students. Finally, they need to provide an impermeable foundation to keep students from falling through the cracks, but at the same time hold students responsible for their own education.

THE STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

Corbett has spent a great deal of time over the years talking with students. Their words, he said, reflect what is really happening in schools.

When he asks students about smaller learning communities, they say that smaller learning communities are worthless unless they result in an increase in the number of good teachers. Indeed, teachers are all that matter to students, Corbett said, no matter what kind of reform you ask them about. And students consistently mention six characteristics of what it means to be a good teacher:

1. Good teachers make students do their work.
2. Good teachers control the class.
3. Good teachers are willing to help at all times in ways students need to be helped even if they don't know or admit it.
4. Good teachers explain clearly.
5. Good teachers offer a variety of educational activities.
6. Good teachers understand students.

So if SLCs increase the number of teachers who make students do their work, control the class, etc., then students think they are a good idea. If not, then students do not think they are a good idea. That, simply put, is the student perspective.

Corbett then offered two principles for using the student perspective to help guide the development of SLCs:

1. ***Every student will complete every assignment to an acceptable level.*** If you allow students to fail, some will. It is the teacher's responsibility to ensure that students do the work necessary to learn.
2. ***Every adult knows every child's name.*** Anonymity is one of the biggest cracks in the classroom floor in poor schools. If the school is too big for every adult to know every child's name, then the school is simply too big, Corbett said.

Ultimately, Corbett said, what is important for teachers and schools is to cultivate the belief that they are responsible for getting students to learn. SLCs that contribute to the evolution of this kind of belief structure can be successful. SLCs are not ends in themselves, but vehicles for changing beliefs and actions.

QUESTIONS

During the question and answer period, Kemple said that his research essentially supported the same points about adults' beliefs and obligations. If adults don't know students, aren't watching out for them, and aren't paying attention to academic course taking and educational opportunities, then students are no more likely to succeed (and maybe even less so) under an SLC structure than a regular school structure. Levingston concurred that teachers must believe that the changes they're making are good for students, and must communicate this message to students. They must articulate expectations again and again, and back the expectations up with best practice. If they do all these things, then students will respond to the challenge.

Another participant wondered: If good teachers are all that's important, why would we expect smaller learning communities to have any impact on the quality of teaching? Other participants responded that under the SLC structure, teachers have greater opportunities to work together and learn from each other. This should allow the best teachers to positively influence the teaching of their colleagues.

Supovitz commented that while that is the theory of why SLCs should improve instruction, the reality is somewhat more complex. His research has shown that if there is no clear authority for who is responsible for guiding collaboration among teachers, there can be a lot of "tug and tussle," a lot of wasted energy. Moreover, considerable thought needs to be given to ways to shape professional development for teams of teachers, rather than just individuals, to take advantage of the social aspects of learning. Kemple also stressed the conjectural nature of the relationship between SLCs and teacher quality. It is a strong hypothesis, he said, but only a hypothesis, and he challenged Houston and others to take steps to find out whether SLCs do in fact translate into better teaching.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Participants then broke into small groups, with the charge of discussing the implications of SLCs for equity, in the broadest sense of that term: equity in expectations, in course taking opportunities for students, in access to high quality instruction, in distribution of resources, etc. Each group was asked to report a key equity issue, theme, or question from their discussion. Among the comments:

- Smaller learning communities can lead to a more equitable distribution of teaching loads and courses, as teachers formerly only required to teach advanced classes, for example, will now have to teach a wide variety of students and courses.
- There need to be ways for assigning the best teachers to schools where the need is greatest, as opposed to having them all end up in affluent schools.
- What happens to teachers when they begin teaching classes with different types of students in them, and they are expected to teach in new ways? Will they get the support for change that they need at all schools?
- When SLCs in schools are organized according to theme, with a different group of teachers responsible for each SLC, will each group provide comparable levels of instruction for all students? Will there be bridges from SLC to SLC so that isolation is not complete?
- How do you provide for common standards and expectations across SLCs? What role should school leadership play in addressing this issue?
- There need to be productive ways of addressing tensions that may arise within teacher groups in SLCs regarding different teaching philosophies and styles.
- It is important to spend time addressing all these equity issues up front, prior to implementation of an SLC design.
- How do you allocate resources among SLCs? Leaders will need to make some hard decisions as they consider re-allocation of existing resources.
- Finally, one participant noted that middle schools have been dealing with many of these issues for years.

Engaging Stakeholders in High School Transformation

INTERVIEWER: ***Warren Simmons,*** Executive Director, Annenberg Institute for School Reform

PANELISTS: ***Linda Clarke,*** Executive Director, Houston Annenberg Challenge
Anne Patterson, District Superintendent, West Administrative District, HISD

PURPOSE: To discuss strategies for engaging parents and community members in high school reform

During this structured interview session, the interviewer asked the two panelists a series of questions about maintaining positive relations with parents, business leaders, and community members as schools undertake major reforms. Panelists also discussed strategies for working with the media.

HOW NOT TO WORK WITH THE MEDIA

Simmons began by describing his own less than positive experience with the media in Philadelphia when he moved there to direct the Philadelphia Education Fund. On several occasions, his words were badly twisted by newspaper reporters. Once, even though he had a tape recording that he sent to the mayor of Philadelphia and others showing that a newspaper story was a fabrication, they acted publicly on the story, not the truth.

HOUSTON PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Simmons then asked panelists about the public engagement strategies used in Houston during the first phase of high school reform.

You need to identify your stakeholders, learn what their priorities are, help them understand the need for change, and develop a shared vision of reform, Clarke said. In Houston, district and Annenberg staff reached out to the business community, postsecondary institutions, community organizations, parent groups, dropouts, and other groups. They used surveys, large public forums, focus groups, and face-to-face meetings. They arranged school walkthroughs and bus tours. Together, they developed a Graduate Profile describing expectations for what a high school graduate from the district should know and be able to do in the 21st century. Community feedback also informed the development of the *Vision and Guiding Principles* document mentioned earlier.

They launched the *Vision and Guiding Principles* with an event attended by Houston's mayor and the U.S. Secretary of Education. There were articles in the *Houston Chronicle* and features on local TV. The next day they held a series of focus groups citywide to seek citizens' input and ideas. "You will never change your high schools," Clarke said, "if you don't have the support of the communities around them."

Patterson commended Clarke for her efforts to engage people and organizations external to the school system. Then she emphasized how important it is to engage internal stakeholders as well. Her list started with the high school principal, assistant principals, department chairs, and faculty. If teachers are not firmly on board from the beginning, reform efforts have a shaky foundation. The central office and school board must back the effort as well, and stand firm when the inevitable attacks begin (especially when the target is sports). It's also important to enlist feeder school principals and faculty, since their students will soon be attending the reforming high school.

Her strategy for enlisting the support of these groups (plus parents and community groups as well) involved the use of data from the existing schools. If a high school has over 1,000 freshman and less than 250 seniors, people understand there's a problem. If the average SAT score is 826 and you need 1,200 to get into the University of Texas, people understand there's a problem. Once the need for change is acknowledged, the next step is to form a task force with representatives from all stakeholders and devise a solution together. The entire process may take years, Patterson said, but the effort is worth it if stakeholder buy-in is high.

Convincing stakeholders that there's a problem is vital, Simmons said. But how do you arrive at a consensus for action when stakeholders generate conflicting solutions?

Both panelists spoke of the effectiveness of using vivid figures, stories from students and teachers, and first-hand experience to shape a consensual solution. For example:

- Figures: 3,300 students in a high school; 180 students per teachers, 800 kids disappearing between 9th and 12th grade (as opposed to more abstract figures such as 40 percent dropout rate); HISD graduates requiring remedial work when they attend postsecondary institutions
- Stories: Having teachers talk with community members about the impossibility of trying to connect with 180 students every day; having students and former students talk about being hopelessly lost amidst thousands of their peers
- First-Hand Experience: Bringing community members into huge high schools to see what it's like to rub shoulders with thousands of human beings all day long; having bus tours to schools in impoverished areas of town

Given this kind of vivid exposure to the problem of size, it was not hard for stakeholders to realize that the solution must somehow involve reducing anonymity and increasing student engagement, among other things. Once some sort of consensus is built, Clarke said, it is important to continue the dialogue. If engagement is continuous, people feel like they are part of the solution.

Essentially, Clarke said, public engagement can be seen as a learning process. Stakeholders need information, experience, stories, discussion, encouragement, reassurance, opportunities to contribute ideas, and plenty of time to understand and adjust to change.

An audience member asked Clarke and Patterson whether they used different strategies to reach the have-nots — the immigrant, minority, and lower income members of communities — than they used to reach the business and community elites.

In many ways, panelists responded, the strategies were the same for both groups. "Every parent cares about their children," Patterson said. "No parent wants their child to fall through the cracks." Indeed, she said, immigrant/minority/lower income community members embraced change much more enthusiastically than wealthier parents. One of the things they fear most is that their child will get lost. They like the idea that smaller is better. Elite parents, on the other hand, are more likely to resist. You must convince them that their children still will have the opportunity to take advanced courses, play baseball, and the like before they will support change.

Other conference participants discussed strategies they and their organizations had used to engage community members. Overall, their approaches involved most of the same strategies that the panelists had discussed: thoughtful planning, work with multiple stakeholders, use of data, persistence over time, and intensive engagement with school faculties. One participant reinforced the power of student voice (students describing their schools and articulating their needs and aspirations) to persuade resistant factions to see the need for change. And she advised reformers to make sure political leaders at every level are aware of reform and the reasons for it.

Federal and State Perspectives on Accountability for High School Reform

MODERATOR: ***Joan Buttram,*** Executive Vice President, Southwest Educational Development Laboratory

PANELISTS: ***Joseph Johnson,*** Director, Compensatory Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education
Judy Bray, Education Policy Consultant

PURPOSE: To discuss federal and state expectations for high school accountability

Each panelist made a short presentation, one on federal and one on state expectations, followed by questions and comments from the conference participants.

THE NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ACT OF 2001

Johnson began with a disclaimer: the regulations and guidance for the No Child Left Behind act were still being drafted, so his comments on some of the administrative specifics had to be taken as speculation.

The overall thrust of the legislation is clear, however, as the following anecdote suggests. After a presentation Johnson had recently given on the act, someone raised his hand and complained, "This is not going to work in our high school. Our high schools will never be able to remain the same and achieve what is being expected here." And Johnson replied, "YOU UNDERSTAND!"

"Congress was not about cherishing the sanctity of American public high schools," he continued. "They were attempting to create a policy environment that would be a catalyst for serious change." The policies address three main areas:

Standards

The legislation decrees that state-developed standards should drive school reform. All states must have standards for English language arts and mathematics (and science by 2005), and schools must focus on getting students to achieve the standards. These requirements are relatively straightforward for elementary schools, but questions arise at the high school level. In mathematics, for example, will states have to have standards for arithmetic, algebra, geometry, or some combination?

Assessments

Assessments, aligned to standards, are to provide information about the extent to which students have met the standards. In some states, current practice is inconsistent with this requirement. A state may have standards for various mathematics courses, for example, but these standards may have no implications for graduation. (Students may not be required to take the courses, for

example.) In other words, standards for a course are not necessarily standards for the system. The legislation requires states to have standards for the system, to articulate what every student who moves through high school should know and be able to do. The standards should be established through a process involving substantial public input, and they should be challenging.

Many states already have high school exit exams, but requirements for passing them are minimal. The No Child Left Behind act asks states to raise those requirements.

Anticipating the inevitable question, Johnson said that national norm referenced tests are probably not well enough aligned with state standards to serve as valid assessments.

Accountability

A state accountability system must monitor the extent to which schools are making "adequate yearly progress" in getting students to meet standards, Johnson said. This applies not just to Title I schools, as in previous legislation, but to all schools, high schools included.

Adequate yearly progress means demonstrating that larger and larger percentages of students are meeting standards each year. This applies not just to the performance of the student population as a whole, but to disaggregated groups as well (e.g., by race/ethnicity, limited English proficiency status, and socio-economic status). The requirement to disaggregate data is a significant change for most states, and there likely will be some surprises, Johnson said. As an example, he cited an affluent suburban high school in Texas (one of the few states that does disaggregate data at the state level) that was perceived as one of the best high schools in the state. The year the Texas accountability system came into effect, this high school was deemed "low performing," even though its average TAAS scores were exceptional. The reason: scores for African American and Hispanic students were far lower than expected. School staff had to begin thinking much more deliberately about what they needed to do to ensure the success for all students.

In general, each state will be required to define a starting point for an acceptable percentage of students demonstrating proficiency (guided by formulas in the legislation). Also, since some schools have figured out how to avoid testing certain students, the legislation requires schools to test at least 95 percent of all students. Finally, to ensure that high schools are not tacitly pushing low achieving students out to increase test scores, states must establish standards for dropout rates as well. The overall goal is to get high schools to increase the academic performance of all students.

STATE ACCOUNTABILITY POLICIES

Bray displayed a series of U.S. maps, each showing states that have or have not adopted certain policies regarding accountability for schools and students. The first set of maps addressed policies for schools and adults:

- ***Sanctions for Low-Performing Schools/Districts:*** Twenty-five states already have performance sanctions in place. Sanctions can range from requiring schools to develop an improvement plan to re-constituting or closing low-performing schools. States are generally

loath to impose the more extreme sanctions, Bray said, preferring to bring schools along using interim means.

- ***Rewards for High-Performing Schools/Districts:*** Twenty-five states offer rewards to schools for high performance in the form of money or recognition. What is unclear, Bray said, is the extent to which rewards motivate educators to work harder. One researcher argues that rewards can have this effect if (a) educators believe the threshold is achievable and (b) the size of the reward is large enough to be worth the effort.
- ***Reporting of Results:*** Every state except Montana now requires schools and districts to report performance data to the public. Still, Bray said, it is often a shock for schools and districts to have to report information that doesn't make them look good.
- ***Teacher Certification:*** Currently, 21 states do not require high school teachers to have a college major or minor in the subject they teach. (In some of these states, universities may require a major or minor even if the state does not.) Together with the reality that a sizable proportion of teachers are not certified, this raises some concerns about the extent to which teachers are fully prepared to teach their subjects.

In general, Bray said, adults are now being held accountable in ways they never have before, and if states stick to current plans, this trend will only accelerate in the years ahead.

Bray then discussed policies dealing with students. Among the policies:

- ***Remediation:*** Fifteen states do not require remediation for students falling behind, and another 20 require it in some subjects but do not fund it at the state level.
- ***Course Credits:*** Currently, all but two states (Minnesota and Pennsylvania) require students to complete a certain number of course credits to graduate from high school. In the wake of *A Nation at Risk* (1983), most states increased their course requirements. Still, only 30 states require 20 or more credits for graduation. While course credits may be a practical way of tracking how much seat time students have accumulated, it does not really square with the new emphasis on meeting standards, Bray said.
- ***Exit Exams:*** Twenty-four states require high school students to pass an exam to receive a diploma (and three more do with some variations). Years of legal challenges have narrowed the conditions under which school systems may withhold diplomas based on test scores. Consequently, exit exams rarely demand more than a low level of competence. Under a true standards-based system, schools will have to make the exams considerably more challenging.

Finally, Bray discussed data on the ***high school graduation rate,*** which can be seen, in part, as a result of state policies. States report graduation data in many different ways, so it is difficult to make comparisons. Several researchers recently calculated graduation rates using a single method, one which eliminated GED recipients and others from consideration. The resulting graduation rates for some states are considerably lower than expected. In 13 states, only 57 to 70 percent of students graduate from high school. In some districts, the rate is even lower: yet another challenge for students and adults in the age of standards.

Most questions from conference participants involved clarification of the No Child Left Behind act. For example, two participants asked about states' and individual teachers' flexibility to make accommodations during testing for ELL and students with disabilities. Johnson responded that states are to develop policies for making appropriate changes in the test to accommodate the

needs of selected students. For example, states with large Hispanic populations may be allowed to translate assessments into Spanish. However, accommodations may not compromise the ultimate purpose of the tests: to determine whether students have met the standard.

Implications of Accountability for High School Reform

MODERATOR: ***Monica Martinez,*** National Clearinghouse for Comprehensive School Reform

PANELISTS: ***Jacqueline Ancess,*** Co-Director, National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools, and Teaching
Gene Bottoms, Founding Director, High Schools That Work
Tam Jones, Texas Education Agency
Robert Stockwell, Chief Academic Officer, Houston Independent School District

PURPOSE: To discuss the meaning and consequences of the accountability movement

The panelists brought diverse perspectives to the topic of accountability. Stockwell is a district and Jones a state official in Texas, the state whose tough standards/assessment/accountability system was the model for the No Child Left Behind act. They have experienced first hand the challenges and rewards of such a system. Bottoms is the developer of High Schools That Work, a school reform model noted for its commitment to benchmarks, assessment, and results. Ancess and the National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools, and Teaching (NCREST) have been conducting research for over 10 years on a group of small schools in New York City that operate under a different concept of accountability, one that rejects standardized testing in favor of a system of performance assessments.

THE TEXAS ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM

For the past nine years, Jones said, the accountability system in Texas has involved assessment in reading and mathematics in grades 3 through 8 and 10, with writing, social studies, and science assessments in selected grades. Scores are disaggregated by race/ethnicity and socio-economic status. Students must pass the 10th-grade exit exam to graduate from high school. Schools are graded no higher than the lowest-performing student group. The threshold for acceptable school performance has been adjusted upward each year, starting with 20 percent of students meeting standards in 1994. Currently, 50 percent of students in all groups must meet standards. Attendance, dropout rate, and several other measures are also involved. "We've been through what you are about to go through at the national level," Jones said.

Jones, a former mathematics teacher, told a story to illustrate the difference that the Texas accountability system has made in expectations for students. In 1980, the first statewide minimum competency test, called the Texas Assessment of Basic Skills (TABS), was given to 10th graders. One of the toughest problems on the test was addition of four-digit numbers without decimals, not embedded in word problems. Twenty years later, the ***4th-grade*** Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) includes addition of four-digit numbers with decimals, embedded in word problems. The 10th-grade test now includes linear equations and other complex problems. "That's quite a difference," Jones said.

Still, under the current system, the 10th-grade test is designed to measure 8th-grade skills. Starting with the 2002-03 school year, the new high school exit exam, to be given in 11th grade, will

cover content taught in high school. For example, the mathematics assessment will cover algebra and geometry, and the English assessment will cover material from 11th-grade English courses. Science and social studies assessments are to be added as well. Assessments in earlier grades will change too, Jones said. For example, students in grades 3, 5, and 8 will have to pass the test, called the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), in order to move on to the next grade. "We're excited about this system," Jones said, "but we've got our work cut out for us."

The assessment system in Texas has faced two court challenges. Jones said that two features of the system have helped it withstand the challenge:

1. ***Advanced Notice:*** School staff inform ninth-grade students what their exit-level requirements are going to be.
2. ***Multiple Opportunities to Take the Test:*** Currently, students may take TAAS up to eight times in an effort to pass.

THE HOUSTON ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM

Houston's response to the Texas accountability system has been to stay ahead of the curve, Stockwell said. Knowing how difficult the challenges of an accountability system would be for a large urban district, they have made a habit of keeping an eye on what Texas legislators are doing and preparing well in advance. For example, Houston's local accountability system went into effect two years before the statewide system took effect.

Unlike the state accountability system, which rates schools based on whether they meet certain thresholds, the Houston system also rewards schools for improvement. If schools are moving in the right direction, they need to be recognized for that progress, Stockwell said.

Three years ago (again, ahead of the state system), Houston began requiring students in grades three through eight to meet state standards to be promoted to the next grade. If they don't meet the standard, they must attend summer school. Houston also provides monetary rewards to schools that have been recognized by the state accountability system as exemplary. Schools that receive an award determine how to distribute it to staff. Superintendent and principal pay is also linked to the performance of schools. All these policies provide incentives for students, teachers, and administrators to focus their effort, Stockwell said.

The development of smaller learning communities (SLCs) should serve to increase accountability, Stockwell said. If teachers are responsible for a smaller number of students, it will be easier to examine the effect of their efforts on the performance of those students. The district has recently developed a sophisticated tool, the Profiler for Academic Success of Students, which enables it to track and analyze comprehensive performance data on individual students and groups of students. Teachers, principals, and district officials will be able to disaggregate the data in any way they wish, including by SLC. Multiple measures of accountability are appropriate for SLCs, Stockwell said, including state and local assessment data, Stanford data, NEAP data, and more.

Of course, he said, it is crucial to manage that data well, identify patterns of student performance, ensure that curriculum is aligned with the standards and assessments, and work with teachers to

improve instruction. For example, analysis of Houston's end-of-course algebra exam suggested that students were not mastering several concepts that were first taught in fifth grade. The district developed a series of lesson plans and worked with fifth-grade teachers to implement the plans. Shortly thereafter, fifth-grade students exceeded the state average in mathematics, and the achievement gap between subgroups in the fifth grade disappeared.

However, getting teachers to support change has been one of the district's greatest challenges, Stockwell said. Teachers are often concerned about the perceived dichotomy between instruction focused on standards/assessment and instruction designed to enrich students' minds. Stockwell reiterated that there is an academic core, based on standards, that all teachers must teach. Teachers can use their creativity to deliver that core, he said, and they can do all sorts of other activities in addition to the core. They must, however, help students meet the standards.

"We have developed a firm belief," Stockwell said, "that if you align curriculum with standards and train the teachers how to use that curriculum, then the kids can be successful."

ACCOUNTABILITY FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Student achievement, completion rates, and other measures of student performance are obviously an important part of any accountability system, Bottoms said. But when a school reform model is involved, the model itself should have some indicators about whether it is being implemented. There also should be indicators about the quality of leadership and support that school staff receive.

High Schools That Work developers collect data on the following aspects of implementation, among others:

- ***Clarity of Mission:*** Faculty must agree on priorities.
- ***Higher Expectations For Students:*** Faculty must decide on a few key practices that raise expectations for students (making students revise unsatisfactory work, for example) and determine what counts as high quality work.
- ***Challenging Academic Core:*** Students who take an academic core or a career concentration with an academic core (i.e., who use reading, mathematics, and science to carry out real world tasks) perform better than students with no academic core. Showing this kind of data to school and district leaders can have a real impact.
- ***Guidance:*** When counselors provide strong guidance (i.e., help 9th-graders outline a program of study, encourage them to take more mathematics and science courses, and get parents involved), students' achievement increases.

It takes a lot of hard work, discussion, and leadership to get high school faculty to reach agreement and begin acting in these and other areas. It is important to have an accountability system to find out whether this is happening.

It is also crucial, Bottoms said, for district policy to support high school reform efforts — by increasing course requirements, for example.

A DIFFERENT CONCEPT OF ACCOUNTABILITY

Ancess opened with several anecdotes from a set of small schools in New York City that the National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools, and Teaching has been studying for more than 10 years. All have student populations that are more economically stressed and more academically needy than the city average, yet all have higher graduation rates and have more students accepted to college than the city average.

At one school, when a girl had a baby, teachers continued to call and visit her until they convinced her to come back to school. "I'm back because my teachers want me here," she said. She ended up going to college. At another high school, one for new immigrants, teachers discovered that students did not have the mathematics background necessary to understand lessons in their physics class. The faculty decided to lop off five minutes from every other class and create a mathematics class to teach the necessary mathematics. They did this immediately, without having to wait until the end of the term or year. Once the students mastered the mathematics, they canceled the class. At a third high school, during a case management session, a team of teachers talked about a student who was coming to school late and refusing to do his work. They discussed the student's home life and strategies they could use to reach the student. Then they divided up responsibilities for helping the student get back on track.

These anecdotes are images of accountability in small schools, Ancess said. The schools have a culture of accountability. Teachers are accountable for effective practice, and for modifying that practice immediately if it's not working. They are accountable for student learning, and for figuring out how to respond if students are having problems. "They are never off the hook," Ancess said. But students are accountable to teachers, too, and both are accountable to parents. "Everyone is accountable to everyone else," Ancess said.

Small school size facilitates the kind of close, intense, and enduring relationships that motivates kids to persevere. It facilitates the "pedagogy of nudge and nag and punch and stroke," as one teacher put it. When kids resist — and they never stop resisting, Ancess said — the teachers simply redouble their efforts: "Kids resist, and teachers persist." That is also a demonstration of accountability, Ancess said.

The SLC structure is a strategy, not a goal, Ancess said. Beyond the lists of features that can be checked off about effective SLCs, what's really important is less tangible. It involves constant communication, a sense of community, and the development of a shared notion of where students need to go.

Where do test scores fit in this scheme of accountability? "Test scores are accounting, not accountability," Ancess said. Accounting does not necessarily have anything to do with genuine accountability. Indeed, it may be used to cover the absence of accountability.

Ancess then discussed other concerns about the notion of accountability as it is currently being conceived by many in a standards-based age. Among them:

- Accountability will continue to be conceived as hierarchical (child accountable to teacher, teacher accountable to principal, etc.). If this is the case, it may be unwise to

create smaller learning communities, because they require the development of genuine communities where everyone is accountable to everyone else.

- We do not live in an accountable or equitable society. Funding is unequal, policies shift overnight, etc.
- The testing industry is not accountable to the public. All their information on item selection, reliability, and validity is secret.
- Schools are too complex to be evaluated by test scores.

In short, Ancess said, we must not be slavishly devoted to tests that leave a lot more questions than they answer. We must develop a sense of authentic accountability where we let children engage powerful ideas and learn skills that will help them lead fulfilling lives and be responsible citizens.

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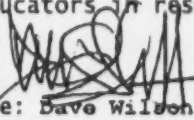
Signature: 

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